

# REPORT OF A COMMITTEE

OF THE

## MASSACHUSETTS

### HOMŒOPATHIC MEDICAL SOCIETY,

OCCASIONED BY A

### REPORT OF A COMMITTEE OF THE COUNSELLORS

OF THE

## MASS. MEDICAL SOCIETY.



---

BOSTON:

DAVID CLAPP, PRINTER.....184 WASHINGTON STREET.

1851.



## R E P O R T.

---

At a meeting of the Massachusetts Homœopathic Medical Society, held April 25th, 1851, the following report was received, adopted, and ordered to published.

HIRAM L. CHASE, *Sec'y.*

The very unusual course adopted by the Counsellors of the Massachusetts Medical Society, in giving such premature publicity to the report of their Committee, with the resolutions prepared for the future action of the Society, indicates a determination on their part to avail themselves of a long-sought opportunity of publicly denouncing its homœopathic members. The proceeding seems to us to be an attempt, under a specious show of argument, to coerce the medical profession by restraints, which are entirely at variance with a truly scientific spirit of inquiry, and with the true purpose and objects of the Massachusetts Medical Society. Professing to devote themselves to the cause of truth by the investigation of facts, they endeavor to limit the range of those facts to their own sphere of vision ; and by the agency and influence of their association to bring into disrepute all who are disposed to take a more extended and liberal view of the resources of nature in the cure of disease, and to affix the stigma of quackery on such as may dare to reject the stereotyped dogmas of the schools.

The evidence of this is found in the garbled statement of Dr. Colby's reason for asking a dismission ; which was not so much the change in his medical opinions, as the refusal of professional intercourse, and general discourteous deportment of the members of the Society in his vicinity on account of that change. The case constitutes an individual grievance, and furnishes in itself no satisfactory reason for contriving a summary mode of disposing of all similar cases by a standing rule, the operation of which would declare a constructive falsehood, viz., that Fellows coming under this rule were never members of the Society, or had been expelled from it for some act of fraud or contumacy ; and would thus impose the penalty of indiscriminate disgrace upon a large and respectable portion of its Fellows, should similar unkind treatment compel them to request a dismission.

We discover no reason why "the period has arrived when the Society should decide and make known what position it intends to take in relation to homœopathic practitioners," except the fact that the number of such practitioners is steadily increasing, as well from the ranks

of that Society, as from the classes successively graduating from the allopathic and homœopathic schools of medicine ; and that the homœopathic theory has indisputably attained to a rapidly increasing success, notwithstanding "the present period is an inauspicious one for the success of any medical theory, that does not rest on a substantial basis" ; and that one of the Committee nine years since vouchsafed his oracular prediction of its then speedy downfall. Hence the necessity of an effort to arrest the progress of its benign and transcendent truths by the whole conservative force of the Society, not in the form of arguments appealing to the convictions, but of anathemas and resolves addressed to the moral courage of its adherents.

We grant the position of the Committee, and rejoice with them that "at no time in the history of the world has the science of medicine been cultivated on principles so philosophic, as at the present" ; and we concede to them with pleasure, that "all the true votaries of our profession are earnestly seeking for truth alone ; accumulating facts by patient and toilsome observations of disease and its effects, and drawing conclusions from them by the cautious process of inductive reasoning." Now we claim to be fellow-workers with them in this laudable cause, superadding, however, to those labors a "patient and toilsome observation" of the minute and recondite effects of remedies on the healthy, as well as the invalid, subject ; a field of observation, which has been hitherto deplorably neglected by our allopathic brethren, but into which homœopathic science has poured a flood of light, whose influence any careful reader may trace in almost every allopathic production of the day.

Allopathy is already indebted to homœopathy, though in its infancy, not only for much valuable knowledge of new properties and uses, as well as mischievous effects of old remedies, and a more accurate mode of investigating them ; but for the introduction of many new and well-proved articles to enrich their *materia medica*. The Committee say, "If we have not yet gained more control of disease than our predecessors had, we better understand the power of remedies ; we know more than was formerly known, when it is best to withhold them altogether, relying on the powers of nature, and when they can be used advantageously in aid of those powers." And again, "It would, perhaps, be doing injustice to homœopathy if it was not admitted, that the promulgation of its doctrines had, at least indirectly, been of some service to the cause of medical science. It may have taught us to place more confidence in the curative powers of nature, and less in medicinal agents, in the management of disease, than we have hitherto done." Thus the "indirect service," which they grudgingly acknowledge to have derived from homœopathy, constitutes just all the improvement they profess to have accomplished in medical science.

The Committee felicitate themselves that in their school, which one of their writers has termed the "beautiful system," "all theories have been abandoned," and they have been employed in "drawing conclusions from facts by the cautious process of inductive reasoning." Yet thus far they do not claim to have deduced any fixed principle of action, or "gained more control of disease" ; and according to their own

showing the beautiful system reduces itself to a mere chaos of discordant elements. They are scandalized, however, that Hahnemann by the same process of induction should have deduced from well-observed and well-supported facts a simple yet comprehensive theory, proofs of which his followers are still constantly deducing from similar incontestable facts accumulating in their daily experience.

On the other hand, we would express to our allopathic brethren our conviction, that the cause of their failure in eliciting any grand law of remedial action, from their (we doubt not) most earnest and sincere search after truth, is, that all theories have not been *completely* abandoned, nor old prejudices *thoroughly* subverted ; that between the lingering claims of Stahl, Boerhaave and Hoffman, of Cullen and Brown—between the humoral, chemical and mechanical pathologies, solidism, animism, dynamism and vitalism, their minds are still fettered by a heterogeneous eclecticism, embracing many of the errors of all the old schools, with the consistency of none. And before induction can have full scope for its exercise, before facts can be fairly appreciated, these musty relics of by-gone doctrines must be swept away, the old pride of science must be humbled, and the conservative spirit brought to contemplate well-attested facts, even though not strictly accordant with antiquated principles of medical philosophy and practice.

It was upon these terms, only, that homœopathy was vouchsafed to the highly-gifted mind of Hahnemann, and has been thus far transmitted to his followers. The apparent absurdity of the system weighed with us, we venture to say, as strongly, at first, as it now does with its opponents. There is nothing attractive in its first announcement to the mind. And had not Hahnemann, like his followers at the present day, been driven by the unsatisfactory results and the dangers of allopathic medication to seek for some new and safe principle of practice, and to seek it from facts, homœopathy, the only medical system which has ever resulted from inductive reasoning, would not now have dispensed its glorious light upon the world.

It is only by the rejection of this true spirit of induction, that our allopathic brethren are still groping amid the ruins of the old theories and doctrines, which they profess to have abandoned, and find no resting place. It is in the old spirit of pride and conservatism, that, entrenched behind chartered privileges and conventional forms, they assail with gross misrepresentations a system, of which it is but charity to assume that they know nothing ; and that hence they "have neither time nor inclination to discuss its doctrines." It is in this inflated spirit of dictation, that they presume to say conclusively, that it is "enough for them to believe it untrue and unsafe." It was in this spirit that one of their number,\* in a public address, had the effrontery to style as a "German charlatan" the profoundly learned and conscientious Hahnemann, whom the "great and good Hufeland," though always an allopathist, delighted to call his friend, and with whom through life he maintained a constant correspondence.

\* See Dr. Reynolds's annual discourse, May 26, 1841, and the vote of thanks of the Society "for his learned, interesting and *candid* discourse."

We are charged by the Committee with declaring the "commonly-received doctrines" of allopathy unsound, and its practice unsafe; as if such a declaration were chargeable upon us only. We are constrained here to inquire, what are the "commonly-received doctrines," to which they allude? We confess we know of no other, than a mass of unconnected, and mischievous dogmas, and think they might find it difficult to convince any one of their own members of the soundness of every such "commonly-received doctrine." And to prove their practice unsafe, we have only to quote, and that abundantly, from their own authors, among whom it is an axiom, that the occasionally fatal effect of a remedy is no valid argument against its employment.

If "at such a period as this the Committee cannot persuade themselves that the doctrines of homœopathy can have any very extensive or permanent influence," whence the necessity for their labored report, their gratuitous condemnation, and their offensive resolutions? If the "commonly-received doctrine" of Rush, with the almost universal acceptance of the Society, could not protract its influence beyond thirty years; and if at the expiration of that time, the equally popular doctrine of Broussais, similarly sustained by the Society, could not survive half of that period; surely the Committee need not fear that the homœopathic system, upon which the Society frowns, and which "is radically wrong, resting rather on gratuitous assertions, than well-founded facts," can ever subvert the "beautiful system." It is true, that since its birth it has witnessed successively the rise, the triumph and final extinction of both of these "commonly-received doctrines." It has struggled onward for nearly fifty years, against professional prejudice and pride, against oppression and persecution, against invective and sarcasm, against ridicule and contempt, through good report and evil report, until it has its numerous advocates in every civilized land, and in every class of society. We have no fears for its success. And we think it quite possible that the Massachusetts Medical Society, as in its estimate of the doctrines of Rush and Broussais, may be compelled, at no very distant day, again to doubt its own infallibility.

In May, 1841, the Homœopathic Society consisted of five members; on the appearance of Dr. Holmes's highly imaginative "Lectures on Homœopathy and its Kindred Delusions" in the year following, the number was doubled. It now enrolls about sixty, who are with two exceptions members of the Massachusetts Medical Society; and there are probably at least as many more such now carefully testing the claims of homœopathy, a majority of whom have already become its converts. These facts furnish our reply to the assumption of the Committee, that "if these practitioners honestly believe the system they have adopted, they can surely have no wish for any professional intercourse with individuals, whose doctrines they repudiate; and the public certainly could derive no advantage from an association, whose members entertained such discordant opinions." Now it is only to their therapeutics and to their *materia medica* (which we call toxicology) that we object; on all the other collateral branches of medical science we are agreed, and our pursuits are the same. It is by the interchange and discussion of "discordant

opinions" that truth becomes established, and errors in doctrine repudiated; on the other hand, an entire unison of opinions in any pursuit tends to limit improvement, and to confirm error. It has been our pride that, as pioneers in the cause of truth, we have patiently borne these, and other fulminations; and thus, being enabled by our position to keep the merits of homœopathy constantly before the eyes of our allopathic brethren, have in so many instances enjoyed (to us) the most desirable triumph of gradually converting them to our views. We think the public does "derive advantage" from our position, and moreover that it has become sensible of it, as well in the direct results of homœopathy, as in its "indirect" influence in mitigating the severities of old school practice. Hence as a body we desire to retain our connection with the Massachusetts Medical Society, in the humble hope that, if we are in error, its wholesome influence may reclaim us; but if right, that we may eventually furnish it with some "commonly-received doctrines."

It is therefore resolved,

1st. That the members of the Massachusetts Homœopathic Medical Society were not cognizant of Dr. Colby's intention of applying for a dismission from the Massachusetts Medical Society; and though they deem it perfectly expedient under his peculiar circumstances, and sympathize with him in his position, they do not hold themselves responsible for his individual conclusions.

2d. That we protest against the prospective measure of stigmatizing all such homœopathic members, as may hereafter be driven by insult or persecution to seek release from the Society. And we hereby declare it to be a transcending of its chartered rights, and a violation of all conventional rules, to falsify its records by striking from the list of its Fellows the names of members, who have never offended against its laws.

3d. That the Legislature of 1781, when incorporating the Massachusetts Medical Society, contemplated the establishment of a "medical institution founded on liberal principles for the encouragement and promotion of the knowledge of the animal economy, and of the properties and effects of medicines"; and not for the perpetuation of any then "generally-received doctrines," nor the suppression of any new and valuable discoveries for the alleviation of human misery. The dynamic theory of Cullen was then culminating amid the fast-expiring glories of the animism of Stahl, the eclecticism of Boerhaave, and the rationalism of Hoffmann; and there was quite as good ground for its advocates to denounce the followers of Brown, who soon formed no contemptible body in the Society, as there now is for the contemplated persecution of the disciples of Hahnemann.

4th. That while we feel a high regard for the Massachusetts Medical Society, acknowledge the past efficiency of its labors in advancing medical science, and are still ready to devote ourselves to its honor and welfare, in every respect consistent with our experience and convictions, we do not acknowledge the pretension of a majority of its members, or any other clique, to dictate to us any particular mode of investigating the laws of the human system, or of administering to its diseases. And that while in the faithful discharge of our duty in combating disease by those

agents, which we have found to be the most efficient, and conscientiously believe to be the most safe and expeditious, we shall not be deterred by the threat of the Society, "to avoid giving us its sanction in the slightest degree." We neither ask nor need its sanction to the doctrines we have embraced; but we do ask, and of right claim, the courtesies due to honest and diligent inquirers after the truth, and suggest to them as a reciprocal principle, "*in certis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus charitas.*"

5th. That the proposed measure in their second resolution of ignoring the rank and merits of the Western College of Homœopathic Medicine in Ohio, and of the Homœopathic Medical College of Pennsylvania, is unworthy of the intelligence and self-respect of the Committee. The former is as amply provided with professors, and we believe of as great merit, as a large majority of the allopathic institutions of our country; while the latter certainly exceeds in the number, and, from personal acquaintance we can attest, fully equals in the talents and attainments of its officers, any of which the Union can boast. Their legal foundations are the same, their courses of instruction as full, and their educational requirements for a degree as great, as those in any allopathic institution; and superadded to these is the laborious attainment of the principles and practice of homœopathy. And we venture to predict, that the pupils from these institutions will eventually reflect as much honor upon, as they can derive from, any allopathic school which may acknowledge their qualifications.

6th. That we have scrupulously abstained from entering into any controversy, whereby acrimonious feelings might be engendered between us and our allopathic brethren; not because we feared for the strength or safety of our cause, but because it is in the spirit of conciliation that truth can be best discerned, and facts be most justly appreciated. That we are grieved to see names, which we have been accustomed to respect, appended to such an aggressive document; but we do feel a confidence, that when it shall be presented to the members of the Massachusetts Medical Society, their sense of honor and justice will insure its prompt rejection.

Respectfully submitted.

CHARLES WILD,  
DAVID OSGOOD, }  
SAMUEL GREGG, } Committee.